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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS
BELFAST BT4 3SS

Tel. Belfast (01232) 520700



John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1A 2AA

11/4 November 1997

Dear John,

MEETING WITH DAVID TRIMBLE MP, 18 NOVEMBER

The Prime Minister will be meeting Mr Trimble at a potentially important juncture in the talks process. The UUP approach's over the next two weeks could significantly affect the prospects for a successful outcome from the talks.

The Prime Minister's objectives might be to :

- (a) encourage Mr Trimble in his efforts to use the current round of intensive bilateral consultations to develop constructive bilateral relationships with the SDLP and Irish Government respectively;
- (b) urge him to make clear to the Irish Government that the UUP would be prepared to contemplate significant North/South arrangements in the context of Irish constitutional reform and the establishment of machinery to reflect the "totality of relationships" within these islands; and (above all)
- (c) press him to ensure that decommissioning does not re-emerge as a road block at the review plenary set for 1-3 December.

Our current assessment of the state of the negotiations remains as set out in the annex to last week's IN paper (copy attached for ease of reference - Annex A). The last week has seen some significant positive developments:

in various bilateral contacts the Irish have indicated that they might be ready to contemplate "East/West" institutional architecture of a kind favoured by the UUP, so long as any North/South arrangements were not subservient and would still be significant, and there was no



suggestion of Ireland rejoining the UK. We have continued to urge on them the desirability of developing their views in this area and yesterday gave them a paper on the subject (Annex B) which builds on UUP thinking;

- Jeffrey Donaldson, in conversation with Paul Murphy, set out a vision of future East/West and North/South arrangements which would appear to meet Irish concerns, while indicating genuine Unionist readiness to establish significant North/South arrangements within an acceptable wider context. (I attach an extract from the note of the meeting - Annex C);
- he also confirmed that the UUP were keen to put their proposals to the Irish Government and to work to build Irish confidence in their good faith. They plan to meet David Andrews and separately, the SDLP on Monday and Mr Ahern, in Brussels on Wednesday.

This evidence of UUP engagement and positive thinking is welcome and will help to counter growing misperceptions in Northern Ireland about the value of the talks process, much of which has been talked up by Sinn Féin who have created something of a totem out of the fact that the UUP refused to speak to or acknowledge them.

Decommissioning

The two Governments have commented on an early draft of the Independent Commission's initial report, and the Commission is now aiming to finalise this and table it for discussion in the Liaison Sub-Committee (we hope **before** the review plenary). The Commission has in fact made a rapid and effective start, although more work will need to be done before the Governments can introduce schemes for decommissioning. The Commission aims to report on the current position at a meeting of the Liaison Sub-Committee on **17 November** - this should help to defuse the pressure the UUP may feel to hold up developments on political issues until there has been "due progress" on decommissioning.

It would be helpful if the Prime Minister could impress on Mr Trimble the need to avoid the review plenary getting bogged down on this issue. The following arguments could be made:



- there is a real prospect of securing Unionist objectives in the East/West strand and on constitutional issues, and an agreed basis for substantial devolution in Northern Ireland. It would not be in Unionist interests to stall progress at this stage;
- the Independent Commission has in fact made an impressive start, even though its operational proposals need to be firmed up with additional detail before they could provide the basis for actual schemes for decommissioning;
- the UUP should be able to note good “work in progress”, while laying down markers about the need for developed schemes to be available before the next review plenary;
- whatever the state of the Independent Commission’s work, the two Governments stand by their commitment to introduce an appropriate scheme for decommissioning immediately any paramilitary organisation is brought to accept the need for decommissioning to commence;
- moreover, both Governments stand over their view that the resolution of the decommissioning issue is an indispensable part of the process of negotiation; they would both like to see the decommissioning of some paramilitary arms during negotiations; and both believe this could be a major contribution to building the momentum towards agreement.

The Republican Movement

Mr Trimble has publicly described recent reports of resignations from the IRA as a Republican tactic designed to enable Sinn Féin to remain in the talks while the IRA goes back to war. The Prime Minister might explain our assessment that the resignations were neither planned, nor amicable, although they do not yet amount to a split. The best response is to make real forward movement in the talks, in order to intensify the pressure on the Republican leadership to maintain their commitment to democratic politics; and the UUP’s engagement with the Irish Government and SDLP should achieve that while also countering the traditional nationalist tendency to concentrate on Sinn Féin’s concerns.



If the Prime Minister were minded to receive a Sinn Fein delegation at Downing Street before Christmas, which would help the Republican leadership to maintain control and is widely expected now that he has received all the other parties, it would be prudent to warn Mr Trimble.

Confidence Building Measures

The various issues identified by Mr Trimble are being pursued. Paul Murphy is in regular contact with Jeffrey Donaldson, who is monitoring progress. Mr Trimble may register particular concern about the need to establish a new balance in the Parades Bill if the idea of extending the Parade Commission's remit is dropped (as some in the Orange Order believe it should be). We have this under consideration.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Grant (FCO), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir Stephen Wall (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours sincerely,

R P Lemon
Private Secretary to Paul Murphy MP
Minister of State